

**making
art
making
change**



MESSAGE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

Dear Friends,

This year affirmed something we have long believed: when people are given time, structure, and genuine care, creativity becomes a catalyst for connection.

Across our 2025 workshops, we worked with seniors who had not left their apartments in weeks. Once they started the program, they began to show up consistently. We saw newcomers share stories of home through paint and collage. We heard participants who began with “I can’t” in the end said: “I did this!” Proudly displaying their artwork to friends and family.

An external evaluation conducted this fall confirmed what we witness in the studio. Participants reported stronger feelings of belonging, increased connection, and growing creative confidence. But what statistics cannot fully capture is the atmosphere — the shared table, the laughter, the quiet concentration, the moment someone realizes they can do more than they thought.

Our model remains grounded in five core elements: skilled and culturally responsive facilitation, an eight-week commitment, reflection-based prompts, communal art-making, and opportunities for public recognition. Together, these elements create not just art programs, but communities.

We are deeply grateful to our partners, funders, donors, and participants who trust us with this work. Because of you, Making Art Making Change workshops remain free to participants and accessible to those who need them most.

Thank you for helping build belonging, week by week.

With appreciation,

Vanessa Barnett and Elena Soní
Artistic Directors
Making Art Making Change

WHY BELONGING MATTERS

Making Art Making Change (MAMC) exists to strengthen social connections.

We work with communities at greater risk of social exclusion and isolation – including older adults, newcomers, diverse communities, and those experiencing physical or mental health challenges.



Global research, including findings from the World Health Organization, confirms that social isolation and loneliness are linked to increased risk of depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease, and premature death. Social connection, by contrast, strengthens resilience, supports mental health, and improves overall well-being.

But beyond health data, connection shapes how people live.

When individuals feel connected:

- They participate more fully in community life
- They are more likely to seek and receive support
- They contribute their skills and perspectives
- They experience greater purpose and dignity

Communities benefit as well. Connection builds trust. Trust builds cooperation. Cooperation strengthens the social fabric.

Our mission is to create opportunities for those connections to form.

Through art-making we build the conditions where belonging can take root.

OUR APPROACH

MAMC delivers visual arts workshops in partnership with community organizations across Toronto.

Our model is intentional and built around five elements.

Skilled, Culturally Responsive Facilitation

Professional artistic facilitators create psychological safety while encouraging growth. Curiosity, humility, and encouragement are central.



Eight-Week Commitment

Belonging does not happen in a single afternoon. The registered format builds accountability, routine, and trust.

Reflection-Based Prompts

Participants create original work rooted in identity, memory, and lived experience.



Communal Art-Making

Art is created alongside others. The shared table is essential.

Recognition

Exhibitions and celebrations reinforce pride and a sense of contribution to the community.

WHAT CHANGED IN 2025

In 2025, MAMC delivered 16 eight-week-long workshops in partnership with community organizations, reaching more than 220 participants.

In fall 2025, an external evaluation assessed participant outcomes across two workshop sites.

The results were clear.

- **72%** reported an increased sense of community belonging
- **61%** reported feeling closer to others
- **67%** reported increased confidence in completing art activities
- Pride in artwork averaged **4.7 out of 5**



Beyond the numbers, participants described real change:

“I live alone, and I’m not part of anything... this was something to look forward to.”

- Participant

Partner organizations confirmed the value:

"MAMC's vision was aligning really well with us, which is to provide services, to help people, but also to help people help themselves."

The evidence supports what we see in every workshop: structured creative practice builds measurable belonging.

WHAT CHANGE LOOKS LIKE

Isolation → Belonging

MAMC workshops are delivered in an eight-week format. Participants return weekly to the same facilitators and the same group. They work side by side at a shared table, responding to structured prompts and discussing their progress.

This consistency builds routine. Routine builds familiarity. Familiarity builds trust.

Participants who began as acquaintances became collaborators. They arrived early. They stayed late. They greeted one another in the community after the program ended.



“When I'm out, I feel more safe and secure just knowing more people outside, and see them around...Outside I can just feel confident and say hi.” – Participant

Partner staff observed that some participants rarely left their apartments before joining: **“This project basically brought them out. It got them out of isolation and got them to socialize... to work in a team... to say, ‘This is what I need. This is what's working. This is what's not working.’”**

The communal format also brought together participants from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Through shared creative work, participants exchanged stories and perspectives organically, strengthening a sense of belonging across differences.

Mood and well-being improved through steady engagement. Participants described having something meaningful to anticipate each week and a reason to leave home.

Participants left with new relationships, renewed routine, and stronger ties to their community.

WHAT CHANGE LOOKS LIKE

Self-Doubt → Confidence

MAMC workshops are intentionally structured for growth. Each week introduces new techniques while facilitators provide individualised guidance and consistent encouragement.

Participants are not left to “figure it out.” They are shown how to approach materials, how to interpret prompts, and how to revise their work. Constructive feedback and affirmation help participants persist through challenge.

Many began unsure of their ability.

“I can’t draw.”

“I’m not creative.”

**“In the beginning, people would say, I can't...
But the outcome is amazing.”**

Facilitators played a central role. One participant explained:

“They give you that confidence.”

By the final week, hesitation had shifted to pride. Participants completed projects they once believed were beyond them.

They shared their work with family:

“I show my children...‘Okay, you're doing a good job, fantastic.’”

“I bring my family to come and see what we have done because they couldn't believe it.”

In several projects, artwork was exhibited publicly. Participants stood beside their work explaining its meaning to family and community. This recognition reinforced pride and showcased participants skill.

Participants left with completed work, strengthened skills, and greater confidence in their ability to try something new and succeed.



WHAT CHANGE LOOKS LIKE

Untold Stories → Expression

Reflection is built into every MAMC workshop. Facilitators use structured prompts to invite exploration of identity, meaningful places, cultural history, and significant life experiences.

Participants create original work rooted in their own stories. The self-reflection components of our workshops give participants space to process difficult experiences and reconnect with meaningful parts of their personal history. Art provides a structured way to explore identity and memory in a supportive setting.



Partner staff at DPNCHC described the impact during a life-sized self-portrait project:

“The self-reflection was so important because it not only spoke to them about displaying their culture, but also about their challenges, their barriers, their life experiences... There was also a lot of victories.”

For some participants, these prompts led to meaningful reconnection. One woman searched for photographs of her country of origin for the first time in years:

“I almost forgot what my country looked like... and I cried.”

The prompt was simple — “Pick a place where you feel most comfortable.” The structure made reflection accessible.

Participants left having revisited personal history and expressed experiences that had not previously been shared in this way.

That structured opportunity for reflection and expression is central to MAMC’s impact.

SPOTLIGHT PROJECT

New Book: New Chapter Flemingdon Health Centre

At Flemingdon Health Centre, a group of women gathered weekly to create accordion books, a signature introductory MAMC workshop that unfolds both visually and emotionally.

Over eight weeks, participants explored self-portraiture, meaningful places, cherished objects, and personal reflections written in their first language. Through painting, drawing, collage, and writing, each woman shaped her story into a distinct visual narrative.

The accordion structure encouraged participants to move page-by-page through memory and identity. What began as tentative mark-making evolved into layered compositions rich with colour and personal voice.

“Here, for the first time, I picked up a paintbrush, and to my own surprise, I discovered a long-sleeping desire to paint...

Although the program lasted only two months, it felt like an entirely new way of life. I am thankful to everyone for giving me wonderful moments, new understanding, and bright new discoveries in my life.” - Participant

The process mattered as much as the final books. Working side by side, conversations deepened. Women who had once only recognized one another began sharing personal histories and forming new connections. The studio became a space of encouragement and trust.

By the final week, participants reported a stronger sense of belonging and increased confidence in completing art activities. New friendships had formed.

That sense of discovery and connection reflects the lasting impact of the Flemingdon series.

SPOTLIGHT PROJECT

New Book Flemington Health Centre



SPOTLIGHT PROJECT

UNPACKING

Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre

At Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre , MAMC responded to returning participants by introducing UNPACKING, an eight-week drawing series designed to deepen technical skill while maintaining the program’s focus on connection.

Working within a restrained sepia and black palette, participants explored walnut ink, charcoal, and pastel while learning the grid technique and advanced tonal drawing. Images were built slowly and intentionally, strengthening focus and confidence.

Technical growth was paired with personal reflection. Participants selected lyrics and poetry that resonated with their own histories and cultural contexts, translating memory and lived experience into carefully rendered images.

Participants expressed pride in mastering techniques they once believed were beyond them. Their completed accordion books, housed in handmade wooden frames, reflected both artistic progress and personal insight.

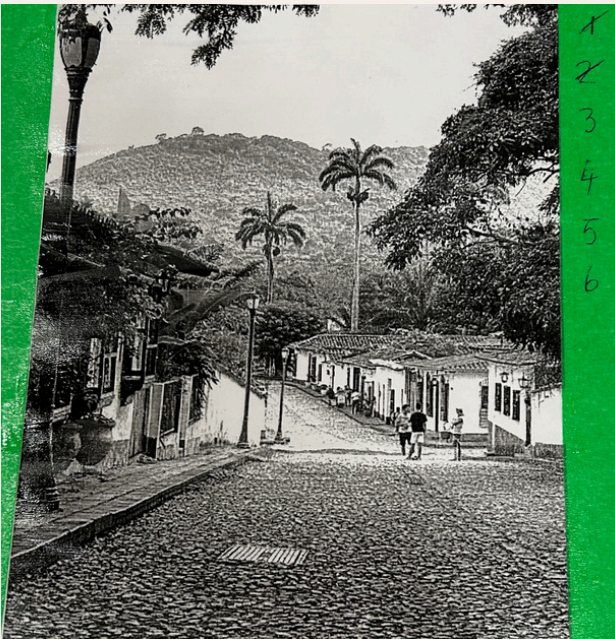
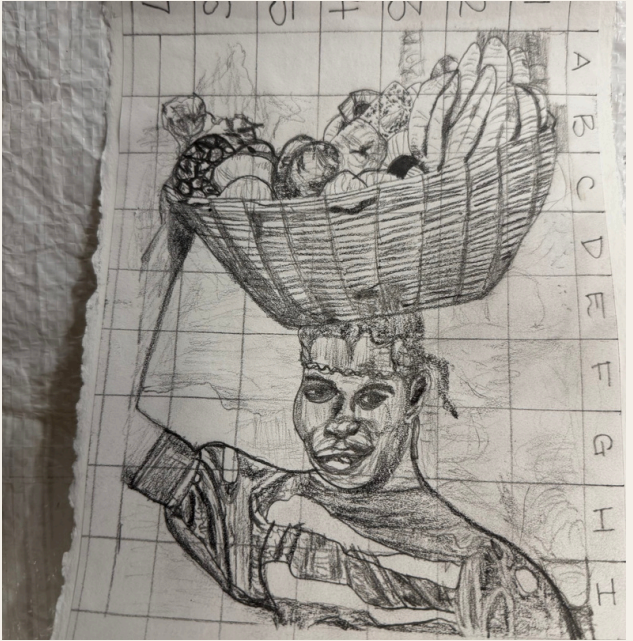
Partner staff observed meaningful shifts in group dynamics over the eight weeks: **“In the beginning, they only stick with the group that they know, the people that they know. And at the end, you can see that they start moving around with other people and talking with them to get to know each other more. They are more friendly between them.”**

At DPNCHC, impact was visible in sustained creative challenge, growing artistic confidence, and stronger peer connection. Art became both discipline and discovery.

SPOTLIGHT PROJECT

UNPACKING

Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre



SPOTLIGHT PROJECT

Making Connections Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Gifts of Light Program

In 2025, MAMC delivered a workshop series in collaboration with Gifts of Light, an initiative at The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) that supports patient wellness.

Each week, participants from the Critical Care Unit for Young Adults gathered around a shared table to experiment with charcoal, chalk pastel, oil pastel, and acrylic paint. As they worked, the emphasis for participants was on exploration.

Sketchbooks became personal spaces for reflection. Participants filled pages with drawings and writing, taking their books with them. Collaborative activities sparked conversation across the table, building connections in a unit where interaction is not always easy.

One participant completed a detailed drawing that she planned to pin to her wall as a reminder of her next steps toward nursing school. Another discovered pride in his ability to blend colour and experiment with new techniques.

Making Connections showed that creative practice can support dignity, expression, and human connection within healthcare environments.



SPOTLIGHT PROJECT

West Lodge: Our Stories, Our Place West Neighbourhood House



This spring, MAMC returned to West Neighbourhood House to lead a community arts project at West Lodge, a Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation residence.

Residents explored identity, belonging, and daily life through painting, collage, and storytelling. Participants reflected on favourite places, everyday routines, and personal memories, transforming them into visual narratives that celebrated both individual experience and shared community.

For many residents, this was their first time making art in a group setting. What began as tentative exploration grew into confident creative expression. Participants shared stories, supported one another's work, and took pride in the artwork they created together.

The resulting panels form a vibrant portrait of life at West Lodge and the connections that shape it. Their impact continues beyond the workshop itself. Inspired by the project, staff and tenants are now working to find a permanent home for the artwork and have begun renewed conversations about reopening the building's "Blue Room" as a community space for programming.

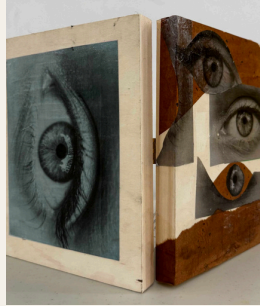
As one program lead reflected:

"It was a pleasure watching your passion shine through not just in teaching new art techniques, but in the way you emphasized the importance of community. You connected with participants through their stories, their memories, and even their native languages. That personal touch made a lasting impact."

PROJECT GALLERY



Conference of the Birds
The Mabin School



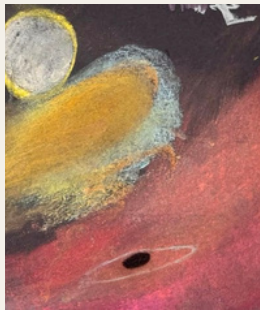
UNPACKING
Davenport Perth
Community Centre



New Book: First Chapter
Flemington
Health Centre



West Lodge: Our Stories,
Our Place
West Neighbourhood
House



Making Connections
Gifts of Light, (CAMH)



Putting on the Glitz
Davenport Perth
Community Centre



Women Make Your Mark 2
The Neighbourhood
Organization



New Beginnings - An Adventure
in Art
Cecil Street Community Centre



New Encounters
Rare Dementia Support



Faces and Places of
Thorncliffe Park
The Neighbourhood
Organization

MAMC was thrilled to receive the Ontario Art Education Association's Community Art Educator of the Year award.

Celebrating excellence in visual and media arts education in community settings.



2025 Revenue

| | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Donations & Grants | \$217,279 |
| Program Fees | \$63,223 |
| Interest & Misc. | \$1,557 |

\$282,059

2025 Expenses

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Artistic Personnel | \$162,976 |
| Administrative Personnel | \$83,737 |
| Program Materials | \$14,292 |
| Promotion | \$2,266 |
| Office and Administration | \$11,680 |
| Professional Services | \$11,813 |

\$286,721

Revenue/ Expenses **\$(4,704)**

Net Assets **\$264,290**

Auditors Report available upon request

WE'D LIKE TO THANK ALL OUR DONORS FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT

MAMC workshops are delivered free to participants, ensuring access for those who need connection most.

Because of you, people built meaningful relationships and experienced a stronger sense of belonging.

Your support helped participants grow in confidence and create work they were proud to share.

Building Belonging. Week by Week.

Anonymous
Derrick Barnett
Marni Binder
Terri Bulger
Robert Durocher
Blok Design / Vanessa Eckstein
Gillian Graham
Linda Milrod and Stephen Grant
Phyllis Angel Greenberg
Maxine Heppner
Sue Howe
Kingfisher Foundation
Jerry Koh / Nice Future Corp
Alison and Bruce McDonald
Marjory and Ian McDonald



The H. John McDonald Foundation
The McDonald Family Foundation
Kelly Meighen
Barbara Romcke
Audrey Loeb & David Ross Foundation
David Schwartz
Kenneth Shulman
Ivan & Lynda Silver
Donna and Gary Slaight
Toronto Arts Council
Elizabeth Trotter
Karrie Weinstock
Mary Yamanaka

COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEERS



Staff

Vanessa Barnett, Artistic Director
Elena Soni, Artistic Director
Gillian Hards, Executive Director (Fractional)
Denise Gordon, Facilitator
Lukas Cheung, Graphic Design
Alan Ng, Bookkeeper
Uma Arrioja Eckstein, Workshops Support

2025 Board Members

Marjory McDonald (Chair)
Gill Evans (Vice Chair)
Gillian Graham (Secretary)
Vanessa Eckstein - Director
Pamela Meredith - Director
Jerry Koh - Director
Dr. Ivan Silver - Director

2025 Community Partners

Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Community Health Network
The Mabin School
Cecil Street Community Centre
Flemingdon Health Network
Rare Dementia Support Canada
Gift of Light, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
The Neighbourhood Organization (TNO)
West Neighbourhood House

With heartfelt gratitude, we celebrate the dedication of our staff, volunteers, donors, partners, and Board members.

Your commitment and passion make MAMC's work possible.

Thank you for being part of this journey!



Making Art Making Change is a non-profit charity committed to giving voice to communities through the use of visual arts, and storytelling.

**Charitable registration number:
770955870RR0001**

MAMC project participants created all artwork in this report.